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*CRIME, JUSTICE AND SOCIAL DEMOCRACY: INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVES,*

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## **20. CORPORATE RISK, MINING CAMPS AND KNOWLEDGE/POWER**

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### **[A] INTRODUCTION**

Australia is currently in the midst of a major resources boom. However the benefits from the boom are unevenly distributed, with state governments collecting billions in royalties, and mining companies billions in profits. The costs are borne mostly at a local level by regional communities on the frontier of the mining boom, surrounded by thousands of men housed in work camps. The escalating reliance on non-resident workers housed in camps carries significant risks for individual workers, host communities and the provision of human services and infrastructure. These include rising rates of fatigue-related death and injuries, rising levels of alcohol-fuelled violence, illegally erected and unregulated work camps, soaring housing costs and other costs of living, and stretched basic infrastructure undermining the sustainability of these towns. But these costs have generally escaped industry, government and academic scrutiny. This chapter directs a critical gaze at the hopelessly compromised industry-funded research vital to legitimating the resource sector's self-serving knowledge claims that it is committed to social sustainability and corporate responsibility. The chapter divides into two parts. The first argues that post-industrial mining regimes mask and privatise these harms and risks, shifting them on to workers, families and communities. The second part links the privatisation of these risks with the political economy of privatised knowledge embedded in the approvals process for major resource sector projects.

### **[A] PRIVATISING CORPORATE RISK, POST-INDUSTRIAL MINING REGIMES AND THE RISKS OF CAMP LIFE<sup>i</sup>**

The global increases in demand for energy and minerals have led to the rapid development of the Australian resource sector (Cleary, 2011a: vii, Petkova, Lockie, Rolfe, and Ivanova, 2009: 211, Syed, Melanie, Thrope and Penney, 2010). By the end of 2011, 'there were 102 projects at an advanced stage of development, with a record capital expenditure of \$231.8 billion' (Bureau of Resources and Energy Economics, 2011: 8). Mining booms have punctuated Australian history and made a significant contribution to population growth, economic development, and the establishment of rural and remote towns, transport networks and other infrastructure in the interior

(Blainey, 1969). The current mining boom is qualitatively different. Until the 1970s, the development of townships and communities went hand-in-hand with mining development approvals (Houghton, 1993), except in far remote locations. However, this is no longer the case. Over the past thirty years, under the growing influence of global economic forces, the exploration, extraction, transport, processing and maintenance stages of mining projects have become increasingly reliant over the last decade on fly-in, fly-out (FIFO) and/or drive-in, drive-out (DIDO) non-resident workers (NRWs) (Beach and Cliff, 2003, Carrington, Hogg, McIntosh and Scott, 2011b, Gillies, Just and Wu, 2001, Houghton, 1993, Storey, 2001).

In parts of regional Australia, thousands of NRWs housed in work camps even exceed the number of residents in host communities (Carrington, McIntosh and Scott, 2010, OESR, 2010). Everything points to huge increases in numbers of NRWs in the immediate future, though no government or industry body is seriously monitoring its associated risks, growth or researching its impact (Carrington *et al.*, 2011b). According to an industry-commissioned survey, most new projects will rely on high proportions of NRWs for both construction and operations workforces (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011: 33). The sudden influx of high risk male populations living in camps adjacent to existing communities disrupts the social ecology and gender dynamics of existing communities located in rural Australia (Murray and Peetz, 2010: 23–25, ABS, 2008). The effective local population may massively increase overnight as a predominantly male, itinerant labour force moves in, creating a climate of fear, risk and vulnerability (Lozeva and Martinova, 2008, Scott, Carrington and McIntosh, 2011).

Alongside the growth in mobile mining workforces, post-industrial mining regimes are characterised by low rates of unionisation, decline in collectivisation of labour agreements, massive increase in contract labour, an intensification of work through continuous production cycle, and a restructuring of the labour processes around 12-hour shifts (McDonald, Mayes and Pini, 2012, Murray and Peetz, 2010). More flexible work arrangements such as these are part of a larger global trend toward precarious employment in a post-industrial world (Louis, Ostry, Quinlan, Keegel, Shoveller and LaMontagne, 2006: 466–67). Much of the industrial relations research about the risks of the mining sector focuses on the work-employment relationship and especially the issues of mine safety. This is understandable given that mine collapses, causing mass deaths in small tightly knit communities, have been a recurrent feature of the industry's history in Australia (Hopkins, 1989). The shift to open-cut mining alongside a safer mining culture has done much to reduce this risk. While many of these dangers have significantly abated, new post-industrial mining regimes raise a fresh set of challenges and risks that extend beyond the immediate geography or spatiality of the work contract (McDonald, Brereton, Birdsall-Jones, Phillips and Rowley, 2012: 23).

The new mobilities of labour brought about by non-resident work practices in the mining sector have profound impacts at an individual, family and community level. While the lifestyle associated with non-resident workforce practices no doubt suits some and is character-building for others, layers of risk and adversity are experienced by other non-resident individuals and their families. These include stress levels; lifestyle and health issues including fatigue; dysfunctional gender relationships and inequalities; parenting problems; family violence; and family break-ups (Carrington and Pereira, 2011a, 2011b, Gallegos, 2005, Gier and Mercier, 2006, Guerin and Guerin, 2009, Haslam McKenzie *et al.*, 2008, Kaczmarek and Sibbel, 2008, Murray and Peetz,

2010, Taylor and Simmonds, 2009, Watts, 2004). These shifting forms of capital–work–community boundaries mean that the employment relations impact not just on the worker or the work site, but also the privatised realms of family life and collectivised forms of social life (McDonald *et al.*, 2012). Rising rates of fatigue–related injuries and deaths that occur off the work site, on the long journey home after an extended roster, is one such example. These are risks of working in the minefields for which companies are unlikely to acknowledge any responsibility, but they are predictable impacts of the growing congestion of the transport corridors in mining communities, for which there is already some worrying evidence (Murray and Peetz, 2010: 36, 192–93, 218–21, Queensland Courts, Office of the State Coroner, 2011, Carrington *et al.*, 2010).

The global postindustrial mining regime has been at the forefront of a trend to encourage the trading of rights, security and conditions for high wages (Carrington and Hogg, 2011). A longer term, more holistic view of the role of work is giving way to a narrower, shorter term focus on immediate economic benefits. Local communities once based on dense patterns of acquaintanceship, participation in local sporting and other activities are eroded by a continuous labour process hostile to family and communal life. This has the effect of fostering social division and ‘generating discontent and breaking up the traditional physical intimacy of rural spaces’ (McDonald *et al.*, 2012: 24). In this sociological context, FIFO (Fly in, fly out/ fit in or f\*\*\* off) has come to represent this seismic shift in contemporary work–capital–family relations (Scott *et al.*, 2011).

Mobile workforces in the mining industry are generally accommodated in work camps during rostered–on work cycles. Camps are typically comprised of demountable dwellings or ‘dongas’ uniformly arranged in compounds with a common mess, laundry and entertainment facilities. There is a paucity of consistent planning regulations governing the erection of these temporary dwellings. Some resemble ‘gulags’, others eco–retreats with air–conditioned quarters, restaurant–quality food and superior recreational facilities such as gyms and swimming pools, while others are hastily and sometimes illegally erected structures, surrounded by barbed wire where the only recreational outlet is the ‘wet mess’ a canteen that sells liquor (Carrington *et al.*, 2010). The camps, while not used to detain refugees or prisoners–of–war, easily convert to immigration detention centres. They conform in some respects to Agamben’s (1998) assessment of such spaces of confinement as places of non–belonging where justice and citizenship are suspended in time and place. What characterises the camp is ‘that the inhabitants are outside the normal assurances of law; they are outside the communities of security and justice’ (Hudson, 2012: 16). In what follows I illustrate how the risks of mining camp life remain largely invisible and how the mining industry evades taking any corporate responsibility for risks and impacts that arise from the housing of thousands of NRWs this way.

The use of contractors in the mining sector has risen substantially over the past two decades (Rolfe, Petkova, Lockie and Ivanova, 2007). Contractors comprise more than half the mining workforce in Western Australia (DMPWA, 2009), and probably the majority of NRWs. Like so much else in the mining industry, the management of camps along with their security is also sub–contracted. The work camps are usually patrolled by private security officers, heightening the prospect that any disturbances will remain hidden from public view. What follows is a first–hand account from a private security guard of one such disturbance.

[Q] On the night of Saturday ... the camp at X ... erupted into near chaos. It began with drinkers from the wet mess area using a fire hose in order to spray others and spilling out into the area where the residents are accommodated. I believe they were horsing around and were extremely drunk at the time. Others were coming and going from the wet mess area, to and from the accommodation area yelling ... I was approached by an angry man claiming residents were banging on doors, breaking into rooms and in one case tipped a bed upside down and placed toilet paper around and over a hand basin in the bath room...

It has been estimated that anywhere between a quarter and three-quarters of all assaults involve alcohol and that '[a]lcohol is also a significant contributor to serious injury from assault' (Morgan and McAtamney, 2009: 2). It was a likely risk then that a lone security guard who described his occupation as 'baby-sitting' 245 drunks would inevitably be threatened. In fact, he was several times and subsequently seriously assaulted, sustaining two fractures including a broken arm, dislocated shoulder, head wound, lacerations and other injuries. While his injuries were severe, an ambulance was not called until the following day and only after he vomited and lapsed into unconsciousness. Nor was the incident reported to police by the camp manager, the licensee or the security firm for which he worked. He concluded: 'It would be fair to say that I was very disappointed, gutted that no charges would be laid against X and felt let down and betrayed by the criminal justice system'.

After being treated in a Perth hospital, the security officer reported the assault to metropolitan police, but no charges were laid until two years later, and only after a review of the first flawed police investigation. This incident has remained hidden from public view, highlighting the limits of policing mining camps through privatised security arrangements reliant on trust, self-regulation and corporate responsibility.

Interpersonal violence is one of the most under-reported of crimes. Where alcohol is involved, the risk of violence is strong as is the tendency to under-report (Morgan and McAtamney, 2009). Police we interviewed in both the Queensland (Qld) and Western Australia (WA) mining regions were adamant that few such instances were reported to them. A senior WA police officer explained why:

[Q] I gotta say, I don't believe that most assaults are reported to us. When you talk to people around town, and they say: 'I was down the pub the other night and there was a big punch up', and then you get into work and there's no report of it, and that can be for a variety of reasons. Either the guys have let off a bit of steam and sorted it out and don't want police intervention to resolve an issue; or someone wasn't seriously injured enough to warrant telling the police; or maybe the licenced premises are protecting their licence to an extent, because they know we keep records of every time we have to attend licensed premises to quell a disturbance ... So my feeling is that crime stats are not worth the paper they're written on.

While local crime talk about FIFOs housed in camps may exaggerate perceptions of risk and deviance attributed to NRWs regarded as outsiders (see Scott *et al.*, 2011), one thing we do know is that the social processes and conditions that produce high concentrations of men in relatively isolated conditions free from close supervision invariably also produce high levels of interpersonal violence and disorder (Tilly 2003: 1). Not surprisingly, the housing of thousands of men in work camps with little else to

do off roster than consume alcohol, incubates male-on-male alcohol-fuelled violence (Carrington *et al.*, 2010). Much of this low level intra-male violence, policed by private security officers (if policed at all), remains unreported as participants in brawling risk losing their jobs if such altercations become known (Carrington *et al.*, 2010). Where employees and contractors sign confidentiality agreements as part of their employment contract, they are further discouraged from reporting such matters. Additionally, hoteliers risk losing their liquor licences if such disturbances are noted in official police reports. As one publican from a Qld mine field recalled:

[Q] ... We had a few fights there [at the pub] ... We never ever got the police involved. If the police ever got involved, someone else usually rang them ... I had three pretty strong young boys, my sons, and we could handle most situations; calm them down.

In an unusual act of public transparency in 2007, Francis Logan, then Western Australia's Resources Minister, 'called on mining companies to clean up their act' after using his ministerial discretion to reveal that 82 per cent of exploration sites inspected in that state, involving 33 different companies, were found to have breached mining regulations (Logan, 2007, 13 November). Hancock Prospecting, owned by mining magnate Gina Rinehart, 'had been fined \$20,000 for the unauthorised construction of a 59-person exploration camp at Roy Hill, 120km north of Newman' (Logan, 2007, 13 November). A sense of impunity is detected in this Minister's extraordinary measure of exposing corporate breaches by the mining industry in this fashion. More recently, an inquiry by the Australian Securities and Investment Commission (ASIC) discovered that giant multinational corporations – of which the mining corporations were prominent – were openly flouting the Corporation Act by failing to lodge annual financial returns (West, 2012, 23 March). Gina Rinehart and Clive Palmer, two of the richest mining entrepreneurs in Australia, were chief among those failing to comply with the Corporations Act (West, 2012, 23 March). The compliance regime of ASIC, the corporate watchdog, has been described as a disgrace. The Rosewood Camp outside Blackwater which had never obtained building, planning or plumbing approval and housed 500 NRWs is another example of a corporate breach given a green light by a state regulator. The Central Highlands Regional Council terminated the illegally erected camp's lease; however, the Qld state government overruled the Council's decision, extending the camp operators lease for an additional year (Unhappy Campers, 10 April 2011: 1). Around the same time, Jo-Ann Miller, an ALP Member of Qld's Parliament, gave this first-hand account of her visit to the camps outside Collinsville:

[Q] The workers fly in, they go out to these camps, which are often on the distant outskirts of the particular towns, and they make no contribution to the community. ... In my view, it is not good enough that they have these disgraceful camps. Some of them that I have seen are not even hooked up to sewerage systems. They have sewage running freely over land ... I cannot see how it is good to have miners living in dongas cooped up like chooks in a pen. (Miller, 2011: 376–7)

There is no public register of corporate breaches of social and environmental regulations available for either Qld or WA mining sector; hence breaches of all sorts that occur in the minefields remain largely invisible. Other than the odd ministerial release or MP speech recorded in *Hansard*, there remains minimal public information about corporate breaches. The penalties – ranging from \$10,000 to \$100,000 – would in any case

amount to a trifling tax on illegal activities for companies that count their profits in the billions (see Carrington *et al.*, 2011a). What this illustrates is that regulating social and environmental breaches by mining corporations pose difficult challenges for government and law enforcement agencies (Tombs and Whyte, 2010: 151) even when these breaches are identified. The privatisation of risk that characterises post-industrial mining regimes means that the harms that occur behind work camp enclosures, the pain privately felt by families living apart, the burdens of a labour process that erode communal life and splinter collective solidarities have been largely overlooked in the political economy of knowledge embedded in the approval process for new mining projects.

**[A] THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF KNOWLEDGE IN THE MINING PROJECT APPROVAL PROCESS**

The political economy of knowledge is vitally important in the mining sector because new projects are subject to an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and in Qld have to also comply with a Social Impact Management Plan (SIMP). Under current regulations, such as the Commonwealth Government's *Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act 1999*, project developers are required to produce their own environmental and social impact assessments. This, as Hepburn points out, has 'encouraged the development of a new industry of privatised environmental impact assessment specialists' (Hepburn, 2002, 5 March). It has also spawned the extensive privatisation of knowledge and industry sponsorship of research, and the industry capture of Australian universities.

There are some high quality social impact studies undertaken by mining proponents, of which the BHP Billiton (2009) Olympic Dam social impact study is an example. Nevertheless, industry funded research in the resources sector is susceptible to influences that independent research is not. According to a study by Hamilton and Downie (2007):

- the abrupt discontinuation if preliminary results produced are adverse to the industry interests;
- there is no requirement for independent peer review prior to publication as a report, public dissemination, or acceptance by government environmental approval authorities;
- there is no requirement to reveal the extent or amount of industry funding or support;
- reports are susceptible to 'massaging the message' highlighting the positive while burying any inconvenient findings in the detail;
- reports are silent about important issues relating to the exercise of corporate power in furnishing survey samples, such as 'captive' industry workers; and
- proponents may insist that researchers sign confidentiality clauses and/or forfeit their moral rights to publish.

The whole knowledge production process is fraught with conflicts of interest and yet this is the process informing vital government approval decisions for around 40 multi-billion dollar resource extraction projects in Qld alone (New *et al.*, 2011). Additionally,

the singular project focus of these assessment processes make it unlikely that the cumulative social or environmental impacts will be adequately evaluated, if at all. The state does not act as a neutral arbiter either in this approvals process and cannot be relied upon to fairly or independently scrutinise the knowledge claims underpinning industry-supplied EIS and SIMP. State governments who grant mining licenses and regulate the industry also earn a share of the minerals extracted through royalties. In 2010 Queensland and Western Australian governments collected around \$6 billion in royalties. Hence state governments have a fundamental conflict of interest in setting themselves up as the arbiters in disputes over access to agricultural land, the granters of exploration licenses and the approvers of EIS and Social Impact statements, precursors to project development consent from which royalty payments flow (Carrington *et al.*, 2011b). Not only is there no requirement for independent research in this process, there is also no independent broker to make informed decisions about mining and energy developments in the long-term best interests and prosperity of the nation (Cleary, 2011a). The striking absence of independent, non-industry funded research into the impact of resource extraction in Australia stymies the quality control of the resource sector approval processes.

In an attempt to address growing concerns about the lack of independent research in this sector, the Australian Government has recently established a National Partnership Agreement for the Regulation of Coal Seam Gas (NPACSG) and an Independent Expert Scientific Committee, to assess which projects require scientific research and to commission bio-regional assessments where considered necessary (Hepburn, 2012, 5 March). These initiatives were secured from the Australian government by Tony Windsor, an Independent MP, in return for his support for the Mineral Resources Rent Tax. While the role of the expert committee is still only advisory, this is an improvement on the existing environmental assessment triggers, although it does not appear to extend to social impact, and is not 'a panacea for what the community see as a flawed and biased mining and coal seam gas (CSG) approval process' (Willgoose, 2012, 26 March).

Industry funded research has been powerfully shaped by industry agendas highlighting a problem known as university 'capture' (Hamilton and Downie, 2007). The University of Queensland's (UQ) Sustainable Minerals Institute (SMI) is an example. The Institute has seven centres, which includes the Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRMI) and a newly established a Centre for Coal Seam Gas. The three major industry partners – Santos, Arrow Energy and Queensland Gas Company — have committed a total of \$15 million over five years, twice as much as the university's contribution (Woodward, 2012, 26 March). This centre has become the focus of UQ staff and student protests keen to distance themselves from its industry agenda and its unique governance model where membership on the advisory board is not governed by expertise but by the extent of financial contribution (Woodward, 2012, 26 March).

The SMI already has a controversial history. The water study undertaken by SMI advised the Qld government that the risk of CSG extraction to the water table was 'as a low 200 GL a year' (Cleary, 2011: 113a). Through a freedom of information request, the investigative journalist Paul Cleary discovered that, at the time of providing this advice to state and commonwealth governments about the contentious CSG projects undergoing approval, SMI was between 60 and 80 per cent funded by industry and had received an additional \$20–30 million in industry funding since (Cleary, 2011b, 5



October). Professor Moran, the SMI Director, acknowledged that the governance model of the new Centre for Coal Seam Gas meant that ‘the more funds that a member puts in, then the more say that member has if there is disagreement over the distribution of funds’ (Woodward, 2012, 26 March). He claims that encouraging researchers to publish their results acts as a check on the industry’s influence over the research findings. If only it were that simple.

A more recent example of the influence of mining industry funding over this SMI’s research centres can be detected in the submissions of the Queensland Resources Council (QRC) and SMI’s Centre for Social Responsibility in Mining (CSRSM) (the recipient of substantial resource industry funding) to the Australian Parliament House of Representatives Standing Committee’s ongoing *Inquiry into the Use of FIFO/DIDO Workforce Practices in Regional Australia*. Both organisations’ submissions to the inquiry claim that the proportion of FIFO/DIDO workers was only around 15 per cent of the Bowen Basin workforce (QRC, 2011b: 12, CSRSM, 2011: 4). Contrary to the most rudimentary academic standards, CSRSM’s source is not referenced, although it happens to be identical to the QRC estimate which misquotes a Qld government report. What this government report actually states is that ‘Non-resident workers account for 15 per cent of the Bowen Basin’s FTE [full time equivalent] population in 2010’ (OESR, 2011: vi), not 15 per cent of the workforce.

The estimate provided within our independently-funded ARC research team’s submission to the House of Representatives FIFO/DIDO inquiry (Carrington *et al.*, 2011b), based on this government report and triangulated with other data, indicates that NRWs accounted for around 59 per cent of the resource sector workforce in the Bowen Basin; that is, four times the proportion stated by the QRC (2011b) and the CSRSM (2011) submissions. Why does this contested knowledge–claim matter? The politics of this knowledge–claim has implications for an estimated 67 new or expanded multi-billion dollar resource projects currently seeking approval by the Qld state government (Carrington and Pereira, 2011b, Appendix 1) to recruit most of their workers as non-resident (Deloitte Access Economics, 2011: 33). The proportion of NRWs has been a source of bitter dispute between the QRC, regional mayors and members of Mining Communities United who claims the existing proportion of NRWs is already too high in the Bowen Basin, undermining the sustainability of towns like Dysart, Collinsville, Moura and Moranbah. Hence new mining projects seeking to recruit most of their workers as non-residents should not be approved. This controversial issue was at the centre of a long running public dispute over the BHP Mitsubishi Alliance Caval Ridge project which sought, and was ultimately granted approval, to recruit 100 per cent of its workforce as NRWs, to be housed in camps outside Moranbah (Moranbah Action Group, 2011). Knowledge–claims central to disputes over mining project approvals matter greatly to the parties involved and the sustainability of existing towns, which is why the distortion of the proportion of NRWs by the QRC and CSRSM in their submissions to the Australian Parliament inquiry is so egregious. The QRC has the defence that it represents the commercial interests of the mining industry and acts as an adversary in protecting those interests. But the CSRSM has no such excuse.

Additionally, the CSRSM claimed in its submission to the Australian Parliament inquiry that it was ‘well positioned to provide balanced and independent insights into the social and economic impacts, as well as the opportunities and challenges, associated with FIFO/ DIDO practices’ (CSRSM, 2011: 1). The covering letter claims that the Centre’s

submission was based on issues raised by their own research (CSRM, 2011). Given its focus on the social responsibility of mining, one could expect this centre would have been at the forefront of researching the impact of FIFO – one of most significant social transformations in that sector. However, this is not the case. A search of the CSRM website (at [www.csr.mq.edu.au/Publications](http://www.csr.mq.edu.au/Publications), date accessed 27 March 2012) reveals that it has not published a single peer reviewed publication about FIFO. In 2003 the centre did publish two reports on workforce turnover among FIFO workers – but that is the extent of research conducted by this centre. This might explain why there were only three references in the CSRM submission, and not a single reference to any of its own publications. Curiously, the CSRM and the QRC submissions also relied on an unpublished study (Clifford, 2009) to support their view that FIFO lifestyles are not any more stressful than others.

The unpublished WA-based study, supported by the Chamber of Minerals and Energy of WA, ten mining companies and a number of other safety and social organisations (Clifford, 2009: 5), has not been subject to any independent external scrutiny and contains very obvious limitations. There are an estimated 38,000 NRWs in the Pilbara alone (Carrington *et al.*, 2011b: 9, Heuris Partners Ltd, 2010), yet the study uses inferential statistical analysis on a sample size of only 222 FIFOs – none of whom were randomly selected but recruited directly by the investigator or through industry contacts (Clifford, 2009: 5). Inferential statistical analysis is only credible when the sample size is large enough to make claims about generalisability and the design uses probability sampling, not a convenience sample such as this (Walter, 2006: 198). Using inferential statistics in this context creates an aura of scientific validity but is meaningless. Being a convenience sample, not surprisingly the respondents were heavily skewed to professionals and managers who accounted for 60 per cent of the responses. Additionally the paper survey only had a 24 per cent response rate, and almost half (47 per cent) had only been working FIFO for less than a year, questioning the validity of the methodology and any claims to generalisability. Yet in the wider political economy of knowledge, this piece of pilot research, with all its short-comings, was misrepresented by the QRC as a factual counter to the ‘speculative commentary’ (QRC, 2011a: 13) of those who criticise the impact of FIFO practices – and by the CSRM as ‘one of the few studies that has been undertaken in Australia that has sought to objectively evaluate stress impacts of the FIFO lifestyle’ (CSRM, 2011: 8). Really? What this episode in the political economy of knowledge reveals is that the truth claims which serve corporate vested interests are subject to little scrutiny and verification ‘before they are accepted as truth by political, media and economic elites’ (Snider, 2000: 180).

By contrast, independent research that highlights the social impacts of mining has been subject to strident criticism by the mining industry bodies. ARC-funded research, subjected to international peer review, has been published in the *British Journal of Criminology* (Carrington *et al.*, 2010) and a survey of the social impact of mining in Qld, also peer-reviewed and subsequently published in the *Journal of Rural Society* (Carrington and Pereira, 2011b) attracted widespread public condemnation from the mining industry. I was the lead chief investigator in both projects. Mr Roche, the Chief Executive Officer and a Director of the QRC, a body that represents the commercial interests of the resources sector, publicly criticised this research as ‘dodgy’ (QRC, 2011a, 21 June) and ‘unreliable’ (Taylor, 2012). In what could be seen as an act of

intimidation, Mr Roche even contacted my Vice-Chancellor to convey his self-serving views. When I appeared as a witness before the Australian Parliament FIFO/DIDO inquiry on 24 February 2012, I was asked to respond to these industry-body criticisms. I explained they were the ill-founded, self-serving criticisms by an industry body hostile to independent research and as such were based on ignorance, not expertise.

Eager to be on top of the production of knowledge for the approvals process, peak industry bodies such as the Minerals Council of Australia (MCA) and the QRC have sponsored their own research and public policy monographs and even produced a toolkit for developers to assess the social and economic impact of mining, espousing:

[Q] The Australian minerals industry's vision is a thriving industry working in partnership with communities in which they operate for the present and future development of mineral resources and the establishment of vibrant, diversified and sustainable regional economies and communities. (MCA, 2012: 1)

Of the 175 submissions to the Australian Parliament FIFO/DIDO inquiry, many provide a stark contrast to the above claims that the mining industry is committed to socially sustainable regional communities. The doctors practicing in the only surgery in Moranbah, a community undergoing rapid socio-demographic change as a direct result of mining and now surrounded by thousands of mobile workers housed in camps, had this to report:

[Q] Moranbah's current GP workforce numbers 4 and the doctor patient ratio is estimated to be around 1: 2750 – an unsustainable and unsafe level for doctors and patients alike. This shortage is further exacerbated by the effects of the resources boom and the influx of population into the area ... too often Industry comforts themselves with the delusion that a non-resident workforce has no impact on the town's soft infrastructure such as medical services, police, ambulance and other emergency services. (Scholtz and Nieuwoudt, 2011: 2)

The gripes of local residents about the impact of FIFO on their communities is captured by what one WA resident in a township at the forefront of the mining boom told the Australian Parliament Inquiry:

[Q] ... we are appalled at what the FIFO culture is turning our town into ... We have less services, less volunteers, less everything. Nobody wants to invest anytime here in terms of volunteering, services groups or sporting groups as soon as the shift is done they are back to camp, and fly off on days off, then these same people will not want to volunteer in their home towns as they want to spend time with their family, so we all lose out. (Resident of Port Headland, WA, 2011)

While the concepts of social sustainability and corporate responsibility have been co-opted into audit compliance and corporate language (Bartlett, May and Ihlen, forthcoming, Kirsch, 2010: 88, Sadler and Lloyd, 2010), these buzz words are a simulacra – not a reflection of reality. An emerging body of research contests the industry's claims to really support 'social sustainability' or to act responsibly (Carrington *et al.*, 2010, Carrington *et al.*, 2011b, Carrington, Hogg and McIntosh, 2011a, Carrington and Pereira, 2011a, Haslam McKenzie *et al.*, 2008, Lockie, Franettovich, Petkova-Timmer, Rolfe and Ivanova, 2009, Murray and Peetz, 2010, Petkova *et al.*, 2009), affirming the lay knowledge of this Port Hedland resident and the doctors of Moranbah. The post-industrial mining industry has effectively eschewed its

social responsibility by shifting the burdens of block roster intensified labour process reliant on NRW onto communities, placing a considerable burden on local services and residents (Carrington and Hogg, 2011). Additionally the ‘fly-over’ effects of mobile workforce who expend most of their income in their urban homes, threaten the continuing sustainability of regional towns (Storey, 2001). ‘Sustainable mining’, like ‘clean coal’ is a corporate oxymoron that ‘conceals harm and neutralises critique’ (Kirsch, 2010: 87).

Pat Carlen reminds us that all good research is critical in that it is driven by a ‘criminological imagination’ predisposed to think the unthinkable (Carlen, 2010). Good research of this kind is almost entirely absent from the officially recognised knowledge bank about the social impact of resource development in Australia, encouraged by a hopelessly compromised approvals process that relies heavily on research sponsored by industry developers, who have a vested interest in the outcome. Reliable independent research is crucial for a fair and effective approval process that harnesses public confidence. When the knowledge bank is not independently verified or subjected to public scrutiny confidence in its objectivity is naturally questionable. Yet in the wider political economy of knowledge, mining industry bodies have promoted research that can’t withstand scrutiny, while attacking independent research that produces ‘facts’ ‘inconvenient’ to ‘party opinion’ (Weber, 1958: 147). There is a dire need for more critical research about the impact of successive mining projects on Australia’s society, environment and economy, to better inform the government approval processes. This chapter makes a very small contribution to addressing that knowledge gap, but there is much more to be done.

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**NOTES**

<sup>i</sup> The ARC-funded research which I draw upon in this chapter did not set out to study the criminological impact of mining camps. It set out to explore the reasons for the higher rates of mortality, morbidity and violence for men in rural Australia. Our initial triangulation of this data identified some high risk regions in WA and Qld where significant mining activity was occurring. That data analysis also identified a region in NSW that had undergone rapid socio-demographic decline mainly as a result of drought. It was not until the team undertook field research interviewing 143 purposively selected representatives from a cross section of these communities in Qld and WA that we discovered the profound social and criminological impact NRWs housed in camps could have on local communities (for details see Carrington *et al.*, 2010; Carrington *et al.*, 2011 Carrington and Hogg, 2011). In the WA mining community we studied, the rate of violence was 2.3 times the state average and had risen almost threefold since the beginning of the resources boom (Carrington *et al.*, 2010: 11). In the Queensland mining community we studied, the offences against the person had grown from 534 per 100,000 in 2001 to 2,315 per 100,000 in 2003 – a rate more than twice the state average (Carrington *et al.*, 2011).